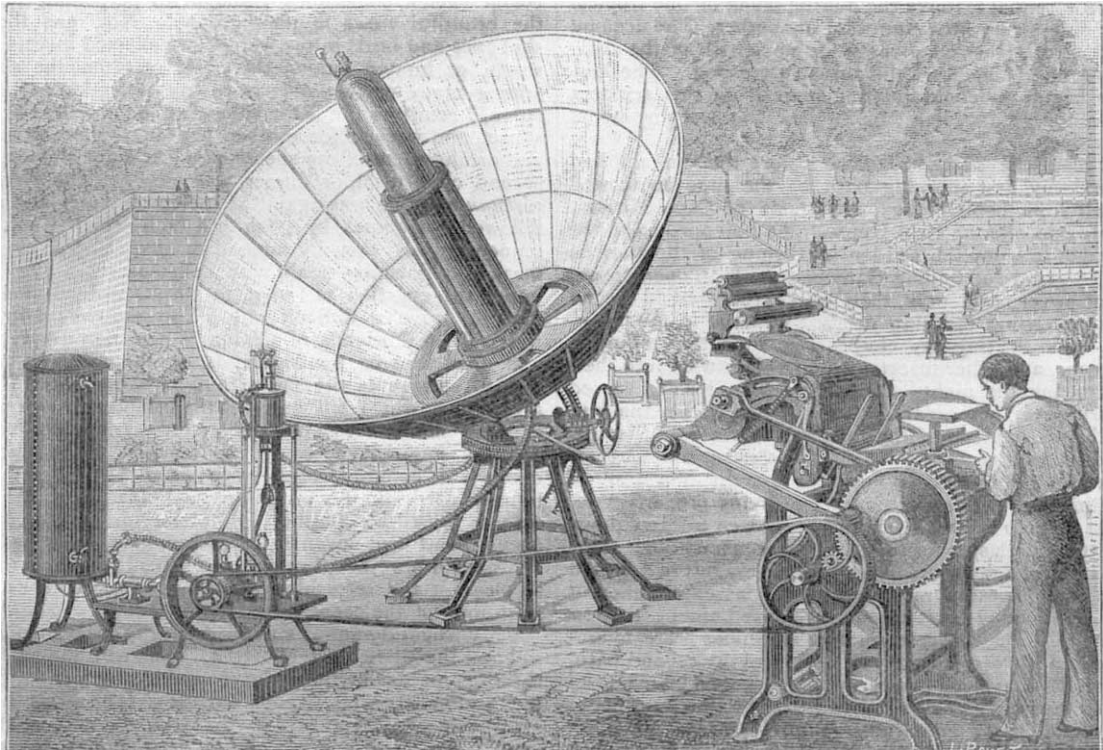


of the contrivance from an account published in *La Nature*, from which the accompanying illustration is borrowed by permission of the editor. The solar generator was one of those devised by M. Abel Pifre, who has improved in some points on the original invention of M.

Mouchot. The insulator, shown in the middle of the picture, measured 3.50 m. diameter at the aperture of the parabolic mirror. It was set up in the garden, near the large basin, at the foot of the flight of steps of the Jeu de Paume. The steam from the boiler placed in its focus



A Solar Printing Press.

was utilised by means of a small vertical motor (shown on the left), having a power of 30 kilogrammetres, which actuated a Marinoni press (on the right). Though the sun was not very ardent, and the radiation was hindered by frequent clouds, the press was worked with regularity from 1 p.m. till 5.30 p.m., printing on an average 500

copies an hour, of a journal specially composed for the occasion, viz., the *Soleil Journal*. This result, though not indicating a revolution in the art of printing, may enable one to judge of the services these *insolators* may render in climates with a radiation more powerful and constant.

NOTES ON THE AYE-AYE OF MADAGASCAR

HAVING recently passed through that part of Madagascar which is the habitat of the Aye-aye, and having made careful inquiries from the Malagasy respecting the habits of this strange creature in its native haunts, I have thought that the information gained might be of interest to the readers of *NATURE*, and therefore note down the result of my inquiries.

The Aye-aye lives in the dense parts of the great forest that runs along the eastern border of the central plateau of the island, but only in that part of it which separates the Antsihanaka province from that of the Betsimisarakana, and which is about twenty-five miles from the east coast, in latitude $17^{\circ} 22' S.$, or thereabouts. Possibly there are other parts of the country where the Aye-aye is found; but so far as my knowledge extends—and I have made inquiries in different parts of the island—this is the only region where the creature finds its home. In Carpenter's "Zoology" the Aye-aye is said to be "very rare in its native country"; and Mr. Gosse in one of his books conjectures that it is probably nearly extinct; but, from what I gathered from the natives, it seems to be pretty common,

its nocturnal habits and the superstitious awe with which it is regarded (and of which I shall presently speak), accounting for its apparent rarity.

The native name of the animal is Haihay (Hihi); but this is not derived from the "exclamations of surprise" which the natives "exhibited at the sight of an unknown animal," but is simply onomatopœtic, the creature's call being "Haihay, Haihay." The animal, as is well known, is nocturnal in its habits, prowling about in pairs—male and female. It has but one young one at a birth. It builds a nest of about two feet in diameter, of twigs and dried leaves, in the dense foliage of the upper branches of trees. In this it spends the day in sleep. The nest is entered by a hole in the side.

The teeth are used in scratching away the bark of trees in search of insects, and the long claw in dragging out the prey when found. A white insect called *Andraitra* (possibly the larva of some beetle) seems to form its chief food. I was told that it frequently taps the bark with its fore feet, and then listens for the movement of its prey beneath, thus saving itself useless labour. It does not flee at the sight of man, showing that for generations it has not been molested by him; which is indeed true, as the

following will show. The natives have a superstitious fear of the creature, believing that it possesses some supernatural power by which it can destroy those who seek to capture it, or do it harm. The consequence of this is that it is with the greatest difficulty one can obtain a specimen. With most of the people no amount of money would be a sufficient inducement to go in pursuit of the creature, "because," say they, "we value our lives more than money." It is only a few of the more daring spirits among them who, knowing the *ôdiny*, i.e. the secret by which they can disarm it of its dreaded power, have the courage to attempt its capture. Occasionally it is brought to Tamatave for sale, where it realises a good sum. Now and then it is accidentally caught in the traps which the natives set for lemurs, but the owner of the trap, unless one of those versed in the Aye-aye mysteries, who knows the charm by which to counteract its evil power, smears fat over it, thus securing its forgiveness and goodwill, and then sets it free. The story goes that occasionally, when a person sleeps in the forest, the Aye-aye brings a pillow for him—if a pillow for the head, the person will become rich; if for the feet, he will shortly succumb to the creature's fatal power, or at least will become bewitched. Such is the account which the natives give of the curious *Cheiromys Madagascariensis*.

R. BARON,

L.M.S. Missionary

Antananarivo, Madagascar, April, 1882

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

(FROM A CORRESPONDENT)

THIS body held its thirty-first annual meeting at Montreal during the week beginning August 23, under the presidency of Dr. J. W. Dawson, LL.D., F.R.S. Ample accommodation for the Association was found in the buildings of McGill University, and the attendance was very large, 939 persons having been registered. Besides the American and Canadian Fellows and Members of the Association, there were several guests from abroad, among them, Dr. W. B. Carpenter, Dr. J. H. Gilbert, Prof. Wiltshire, and Dr. Phéné, of London; Dr. Samuel Houghton and Prof. Fitzgerald from Dublin, together with Messrs. Szabo of Budapest, Kowalesky of Moscow, and König of Paris, all of whom made communications to the Association.

After the opening ceremonies on the morning of the first day, the nine sections into which the Association is now divided listened to the addresses of their respective vice-presidents. These sections are as follows:—A. Mathematics and Astronomy; B. Physics; C. Chemistry; D. Mechanical Science; E. Geology and Geography; F. Biology; G. Histology and Microscopy; H. Anthropology; and I. Economic Science and Statistics. According to custom, the retiring president of the Association, Dr. George J. Brush, gave his address on the first Wednesday evening, taking for his theme, The Progress of American Mineralogy. This was followed by a reception of the Members of the Association by the Local Committee, its chairman, Dr. Sterry Hunt, acting as host. On Thursday evening the New Redpath Museum of Natural History, lately erected at a cost of 100,000 dollars by Mr. Peter Redpath, and by him presented to the University, was formally opened with addresses by Mr. James Hall and Dr. W. B. Carpenter, a reception being given therein by the President and Mrs. Dawson to the Association and others. Thursday and Friday were devoted to the work of the sections, but Saturday was given to excursions to Ottawa and to Quebec, in both of which cities entertainments were provided by the citizens. Public lectures were given on Monday and Tuesday evenings by Dr. W. B. Carpenter and Prof. Meville Bell, on The Temperature of the Deep Sea, and On Visible Speech. The reading

of papers, however, occupied both the morning and afternoon of these days, and of Wednesday the 30th, on the evening of which day the closing meeting was held, the Association adjourning to meet next August at Minneapolis, in Minnesota, under the presidency of Dr. C. A. Young, of Princeton, New Jersey. The number of papers entered was 256, of which nearly all were read either at length or in abstract, and will be published in the Proceedings.

In addition to the excursions already noticed was one provided by the Harbour Commissioners, and another through South-eastern Canada, to Lake Memphramagog at the close of the meeting. An entertainment in the galleries of the Montreal Fine Art Association should also be mentioned, and various garden parties and *fêtes* by the citizens, who vied with each other and with the railways and steamboat lines in their hospitalities to the members of the Association.

Mention should here be made of a Handbook of Montreal, an illustrated volume of 159 pages, prepared for the meeting by Mr. S. E. Dawson, of the Local Committee, and presented to the members. This little book is remarkable for its excellent historical introduction, and also for a valuable coloured geological map of the environs of the city, prepared by Dr. Sterry Hunt.

After the meeting a small party, including Dr. Carpenter, Prof. Wiltshire, and Dr. Szabo, were conducted by Dr. J. W. Dawson and Dr. Sterry Hunt to the remarkable locality of *Eozoon Canadense*, near St. André Avellin, among the Laurentide Hills, not far from the City of Ottawa.

PROFESSOR PLANTAMOUR

THE daily journals notify the decease on the 7th instant, at Geneva, of Prof. Plantamour, for many years Director of the Observatory and Professor of Astronomy in the University of that city.

Emile Plantamour was born at Geneva in 1815, and received his early education in the old college founded by Calvin. He entered the Geneva Academy in 1833, where he became a pupil of Alfred Gautier, then in the Chair of Astronomy, and on graduating, adopted this science as his profession. He studied two years at Paris under Arago, and subsequently proceeded to Königsberg, where he became a pupil of the illustrious Bessel. His inaugural dissertation was upon the methods of calculating the orbits of comets, and he obtained the degree of Doctor in 1839. He subsequently visited Berlin where Encke was then one of the great masters of astronomical science of the day. On returning to Geneva he was appointed Professor of Astronomy and Director of the Observatory; these positions he continued to occupy nearly up to the time of his decease. The observations made under his direction were published in various parts, commencing in 1843, and related to astronomy, magnetism, and meteorology. He took part in a number of geodetical operations in Switzerland, and was the representative of Geneva on the Swiss Geodesic Commission.

Plantamour was a man of considerable private means, and hence was independent of the very modest salary attaching to his official position. A few years since he presented a 10-inch refractor to the Observatory of Geneva, and a building suitable for it was erected at his expense. This instrument has already done good work in the hands of Dr. Meyer. Plantamour devoted much attention to cometary astronomy, one of his most elaborate investigations being his determination of definitive elements of Mauvais' comet of 1844, which was observed from July 7 in that year, to the middle of March, 1845, and therefore offered a favourable opportunity for the calculation of the true form of orbit. Plantamour's result was a somewhat notable one: after taking into account the effect of the attraction of the planets during the